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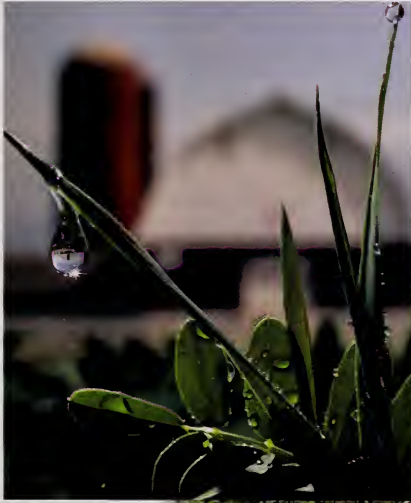
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# buffers

common-sense  
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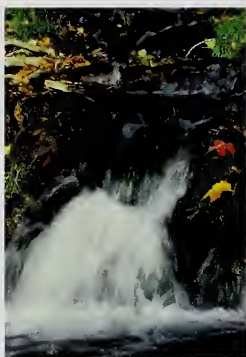
United States Department of Agriculture

Program Aid 1615



Conservation buffers are a common-sense way for you to protect your most valuable asset – your land – and demonstrate your personal commitment to conservation.

What's more, the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-up makes the use of conservation buffers economically attractive. You can sign up any day at your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center ... without having to make a competitive offer as required during the general CRP sign-up. Your offer will be automatically accepted if all eligibility requirements are met.



Best described as strips or small areas of land in permanent vegetation, conservation buffers help control potential pollutants and manage other environmental concerns. Filter strips, field borders, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, shelterbelts, contour grass strips, and riparian (streamside) buffers are all examples of conservation buffers.

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Conservation buffers can be especially helpful to you in maintaining a productive, profitable, and responsible farming

or ranching operation. America's farms and ranches today produce more than crops and livestock. They also produce environmental benefits, and conservation buffers can help you protect soil, air, and water quality; improve fish and wildlife habitat; and demonstrate a commitment to land stewardship.

Conservation buffers can be used along streams and around lakes or wetlands. They can also be installed at field edges or within fields. Buffers are most effective, of course, if they are planned as part of a comprehensive conservation system.



To maximize their effectiveness and your overall conservation program, buffers should be combined with other proven conservation practices, such as conservation tillage, nutrient management, and integrated pest management. Working together, these practices will provide you with an effective yet profitable conservation program.

This brochure will help you understand what conservation buffers are and how they can be worked into your farming or ranching operation. The brochure will also acquaint you with the USDA programs available to help you install and maintain conservation buffers.

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## riparian buffers

Streamside plantings of trees, shrubs, and grasses that can intercept contaminants from both surface water and ground water before they reach a stream and that help restore damaged streams.



## filter strips

Strips of grass used to intercept or trap field sediment, organics, pesticides, and other potential pollutants before they reach a body of water.



## grassed waterways

Strips of grass seeded in areas of cropland where water concentrates or flows off a field. While they are primarily used to prevent gully erosion, waterways can be combined with filter strips to trap contaminants or field sediment.



## salt-tolerant vegetation

Special areas planted to vegetation capable of growing in high-saline environments and capable of reducing saline seepage.



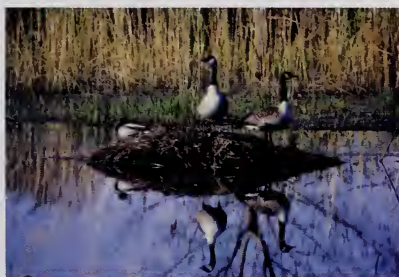
## cross-wind trap strips

Rows of perennial vegetation planted in varying widths and oriented perpendicular to the prevailing wind direction. Cross-wind trap strips can effectively prevent wind erosion in cropping areas with high average annual wind speeds.



## shallow water areas for wildlife

Areas of shallow water within or near cropland that are protected by permanent shrubs, trees, and grassed areas. These areas are vital to enhancing wildlife habitat.



## wellhead protection areas

Land within a maximum 2,000-foot radius from a public well, as designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or a State-designated agency, can be enrolled in the continuous CRP sign-up. Circular-shaped areas can be “squared off” to eliminate odd-shaped corners to a maximum of 367 acres.

## other types of buffers include:

**Field Borders** — Grass-seeded areas along the edges or ends of cropland.

**Alley Cropping** — Crops planted between rows of larger mature trees.

**Herbaceous Wind Barriers** — Perennial vegetation established in rows across the prevailing wind direction.

**Vegetative Barriers** — Narrow, permanent strips of dense, tall, stiff, erect perennial vegetation established parallel and perpendicular to the dominant slope of the field.

**Streambank Plantings** — Plants, shrubs, and/or trees placed to protect streambanks.

## the value of buffers

Chances are you are already using some form of conservation buffer in your farming or ranching operation. When used as part of a well-planned and properly implemented conservation farming system, buffers can play a big role in your conservation plans.

Buffers slow water runoff, trap sediment, and enhance water infiltration in the buffer itself. They also trap fertilizers, pesticides, bacteria, pathogens, and heavy metals, minimizing the chances of these potential pollutants reaching surface water and ground water sources. Buffers also trap snow and reduce blowing soil in areas with strong winds. They protect livestock from harsh weather, offer a natural habitat for wildlife, and improve fish habitat. Wooded buffers can also provide a source of future income.

Properly installed and well-maintained buffers help diversify the “look” of your farm, adding to its beauty, recreational opportunities, land value, and even air quality. All of these benefits add up to make buffers a visible demonstration of your own personal commitment to common-sense conservation.



## types of buffers

There are many different types of buffers. While these practices may be called different names in different regions of the country, their functions are much the same — improve and protect ground water and surface water quality; reduce erosion on cropland and streambanks; and provide protection and cover for livestock, wildlife, and fish.



## shelterbelts/ field windbreaks

A row or rows of trees, shrubs, or other plants used to reduce wind erosion, protect young crops, and control blowing snow. Shelterbelts also provide excellent protection from the elements for wildlife, livestock, houses, and farm buildings. Field windbreaks are similar to shelterbelts but are located along crop field borders or within the field itself. They may also be called hedgerow plantings in some areas.



## living snow fences

Similar in design to field windbreaks/shelterbelts, living snow fences serve the additional function of being used to help manage snow deposits to protect buildings, roads, and other property. They can be designed and placed to help protect nearby areas for livestock, provide wildlife cover, and collect snow to enhance soil moisture and nearby water supplies.



## contour grass strips

Narrow bands of perennial vegetation established across the slope of a crop field and alternated down the slope with strips of crops. Properly designed and maintained contour grass strips can reduce soil erosion, minimize transport of sediment and other water-borne contaminants, and provide wildlife habitat.





## continuous CRP sign-up

An important new opportunity to help you establish continuous CRP sign-up. This program allows you to establish certain marginal pasture and enroll the land in the CRP at any time without a competitive offer. If you have land covered by an expiring CRP contract, you have a choice about bringing the land out of CRP. You can:

Working with the staff in your local National Wildlife Refuge district office, you identify those buildings and structures that are most suitable for your land. You then consult with your local Farm Service Agency conservationist to determine eligibility requirements and the amount of CRP you can enroll.

To be eligible, you must have a marginal pasture. Cropland is eligible if it is currently producing a natural commodity in 2 of the last 5 years and is capable of being cropped. The land must be:

Marginal pasture that is suitable for CRP enrollment.









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